NUMB CXVII.

The SPECTATOR.

——Ipſi ſibi ſomnia fingunt. Virg.

Saturday, July 14. 1711.

THERE are ſome Opinions in which a Man ſhould ſtand Neuter, without engaging his Aſſent to one ſide or the other. Such a hovering Faith as this, which refuſes to ſettle upon any Determination, is abſolutely neceſſary in a Mind that is carefull to avoid Errors and Prepoſſeſſions. When the Arguments preſs equally on both ſides in matters that are indifferent to us, the ſafeſt Method is to give up our ſelves to neither.

It is with this Temper of Mind that I conſider the Subject of Witch-craft. When I hear the Relations that are made from all parts of the World, not only from *Norway* and *Lapland*, from the *Eaſt* and *Weſt Indies*, but from every particular Nation in *Europe*, I cannot forbear thinking that there is ſuch an Intercourſe and Commerce with Evil Spirits, as that which we expreſs by the name of Witch-craft. But when I conſider that the ignorant and credulous Parts of the World abound moſt in theſe Relations, and that the Perſons among us who are ſuppoſed to engage in ſuch an Infernal Commerce are People of a weak Underſtanding and crazed Imagination, and at the ſame time reflect upon the many Impoſtures and Deluſions of this Nature that have been detected in all Ages, I endeavour to ſuſpend my Belief till I hear more certain Accounts than any which have yet come to my Knowledge. In ſhort, when I conſider the Queſtion, Whether there are any Perſons in the World as thoſe we call Witches? my Mind is divided between the two oppoſite Opinions, or rather (to ſpeak my Thoughts freely) I believe in general that there is and has been ſuch a Thing as Witch-craft; but at the ſame time can give no Credit to any Particular Inſtance of it.

I am engaged in this Speculation, by ſome Occurrences that I met with Yeſterday, which I ſhall give my Reader an Account of at large. As I was walking with my Friend Sir ROGER by the ſide of one of his Woods, an old Woman applied her ſelf to me for my Charity. Her Dreſs and Figure put me in mind of a Deſcription in *Otway*, which I could not forbear repeating on this occaſion.

In a cloſe Lane as I purſu'd my Journey,
I ſpy'd a wrinkled Hag, *with Age grown double,*
Picking dry Sticks, and mumbling to her ſelf.
Her Eyes with ſcalding Rheum were gall'd and red,
Cold Palſy ſhook her Head; her Hands ſeem'd wither'd;
And on her crooked Shoulders had ſhe wrap'd
The tatter'd Remnants of an old ſtriped Hanging,
Which ſerv'd to keep her Carcaſs from the Cold:
So there was nothing of a piece about her.
Her lower Weeds were all o'er coarſly patch'd
With diff'rent-colour'd Rags, black, red, white, yellow,
And ſeem'd to ſpeak Variety of Wretchedneſs.

The Knight told me, upon hearing the Deſcription, that this very old Woman had the Reputation of a Witch all over the Country, that her Lips were obſerved to be always in Motion, and that there was not a Switch about her Houſe which her Neighbours did not believe had carried her ſeveral hundreds of Miles. If ſhe chanced to ſtumble, they always found Sticks or Straws that lay in the Figure of a Croſs before her. If ſhe made any Miſtake at Church, and cryed *Amen* in a wrong place, they never failed to conclude that ſhe was ſaying her Prayers backwards. There was not a Maid in the Pariſh that would take a Pinn of her, though ſhe ſhould offer a Bag of Mony with it. She goes by the Name of *Moll White*, and has made the Country ring with ſeveral imaginary Exploits that are palmed upon her. If the Dairy Maid does not make her Butter come ſo ſoon as ſhe would have it, *Moll White* is at the bottom of the Churne. If a Horſe ſweats in the Stable, *Moll White* has been upon his Back. If a Hare makes an unexpected Eſcape from the Hounds, the Huntſman curſes *Moll White*. Nay, (ſays Sir ROGER) I have known the Maſter of the Pack, upon ſuch an Occaſion, ſend one of his Servants to ſee if *Moll White* had been out that Morning.

This

This Account raiſed my Curioſity ſo far, that I beg'd my Friend Sir ROGER to go with me into her Hovel, that ſtood by it ſelf under the ſide of the Wood. Upon our firſt entering Sir ROGER winked to me, and pointed at ſomething that ſtood behind the Door, which upon looking that way I found to be an old Broomſtaff. At the ſame time he whiſpered me in the Ear to take notice of a Tabby Cat that ſate in the Chimny-Corner, which, as the Knight told me, lay under as bad a Report as *Moll White* her ſelf; for beſides that *Moll* is ſaid often to accompany her in the ſame Shape, the Cat is reported to have ſpoken twice or thrice in her Life, and to have played ſeveral Pranks above the Capacity of an ordinary Cat.

I was ſecretly concerned to ſee Human Nature in ſo much Wretchedneſs and Diſgrace, but at the ſame time could not forbear ſmiling to hear Sir ROGER, who is a little puzzled about the old Woman, adviſing her as a Juſtice of Peace to avoid all Communication with the Devil, and never to hurt any of her Neighbours Cattle. We concluded our Viſit with a Bounty, which was very acceptable.

In our Return home, Sir ROGER told me that old *Moll* had been often brought before him for making Children ſpit Pins, and giving Maids the Night-Mare; and that the Country People would be toſſing her into a Pond, and trying Experiments with her every Day, if it was not for him and his Chaplain.

I have ſince found, upon Enquiry, that Sir ROGER was ſeveral times ſtaggered with the Reports that had been brought him concerning this old Woman, and would frequently have bound her over to the County Seſſions, had not his Chaplain with much ado perſwaded him to the contrary.

I have been the more particular in this Account, becauſe I hear there is ſcarce a Village in *England* that has not a *Moll White* in it. When an old Woman begins to doat, and grow chargeable to a Pariſh, ſhe is generally turned into a Witch, and fills the whole Country with extravagant Fancies, imaginary Diſtempers, and terrifying Dreams. In the mean time, the poor Wretch that is the innocent Occaſion of ſo many Evils begins to be frighted at her ſelf, and ſometimes confeſſes ſecret Commerces and Familiarities that her Imagination forms in a delirious old Age. This frequently cuts off Charity from the greateſt Objects of Compaſſion, and inſpires People with a Malevolence towards thoſe poor decrepid Parts of our Species, in whom Human Nature is defaced by Infirmity and Dotage.

Compleat Seats of this Paper, for the Month of June, are to be ſold by Mr. Graves in St. James's Street; Mr. Lewis under Tom's Coffee-Houſe, Covent-Garden; Mr. Lillie, Perfumer, at the Corner of Beaufort-Buildings; Mr. Sanger at the Temple Gate; Mr. Lloyd near the Church in the Temple; Mr. Ka... ton in St. Paul's Church-Yard; Mr. Round in E... change Ally, and Mrs. Baldwin in Warwick-La... where alſo may be had thoſe for the Months of Ma... April and May.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

At the Deſire of ſeveral Ladies of Quali... By her Majeſty's Company of Comedians.

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, on Tueſ... Next being the 17th Day of July, will be preſented A P... Call'd. Sophoniſba, or Hannibal's Overthrow. The Part of Maſi... to be perform'd by Mr. Booth, and all the other Parts to the... Advantage.

This Play is Sold by Jacob Tonſon at Shakeſpear's Head o... againſt Catharine Street in the Strand.

An Entertainment of Muſick, conſiſting of a Poe... call'd, the Paſſion of Sappho: Written by Mr. Harriſon. A Song... panning it Wine and Muſick have the Power; by Mr. Prior. And... Feaſt of Alexander: Written by Mr. Dryden; as they are ſe... Muſick by Mr. Thomas Clayton (Author of Arſinoe) will be p... formed at his Houſe in York-buildings, on Monday the 16th Inſ... being the 8 in the Evening. Tickets, at 5 s. each, may be h... St. James's Coffee-houſe, and at Mr. Charles Lillie's, the Corne... Beaufort Buildings. *A principal Part is to be Perform'd by a... Voice.*

This Poem is Sold by Jacob Tonſon, at Shakeſpear's Head o... againſt Catherine-ſtreet in the Strand.

Whereas Colonel Hen. Hawker dy'd about ... Months ſince indebted to his Nephew Colonel Peter Hawker, no... Priſoner in Spain, in a Conſiderable ſum of Money, and it being... prehended by Elizabeth Hawker, the Wife of the ſaid Peter Hawk... that the ſaid Peter Hawker has lately remitted to the ſaid Hen... ker ſince his Death, ſeveral Bills of Exchange: This is to adver... Merchants and others, not to pay any Bills of Exchange drawn o... them payable to the ſaid Henry Hawker, upon the account of... ſaid Peter Hawker, to any Perſon whatever, but to give Notice... the ſaid Elizabeth Hawker at Mr. Harriſon's, a Woollen Draper... the Golden Angel in Bedford Street in Covent Garden, for which... ſhall be well Gratified.

The famous Chymical Secret for the Tooth-A... a Drop or two of which infallibly and inſtantly takes away the ſ... eſt Pain, tho' ſo violent and raging as almoſt to cauſe Diſtractio... leſs than a Minutes time gives eaſe to admiration, and not only ... the Pain quite away, (whether the Tooth be ſound or rotten) but ... certainly prevents its returning again. Price 2 s. 6 d. a Bottle (wh... contains enough to cure 20 People,) with Directions. Sold only ... Mr. Bell's, a Bookſeller, at the Croſs-Keys and Bible in Cornhill ... St. Clement's Market, where the moſt infallible Plaiſter for taking o... Corns is Sold at 1 s. a Box, with Directions.

Famous Drops for Hypocondriack Melancholy... Which effectually cure on the Spot, by reſtifying the Stomach ... Blood, clearing them from all Impurities, and giving a new T... to their Ferment, attenuating all vitious tenacious Humours (wh... make the Head heavy, clog the Spirits, confuſe the Mind, and c... the deepeſt Melancholy, with direful Views and black Reflec... conforming the Brain and Nerves, compoſing the hurried Tho... and introducing bright lively Ideas and pleaſant Briskneſs, inſtead... diſmal Apprehenſions and dark Incumbrance of the Soul, ſetting ... Intellectuals at Liberty to act with Courage, Serenity and ... Chearfulneſs, and cauſing a viſible diffuſive Joy to reign in the ... of uneaſie Doubts, Fears, &c. for which it may be truly cha... infallible. *Price* 3 s. 6 d. a Bottle with Directions. Sold only ... Mr. Bell's Bookſeller at the Croſs Keys and Bible in Cornhill ... the Royal-Exchange.

Having happily experienc'd upon two of my C... dren, extreamly afflicted by the hard breeding of their Teeth ... wherein particularly expoſed to the utmoſt Danger of Convul... and even hazard of Life) a Medicine prepared by Mr. Perro... Surgeon, I cannot but acknowledge that the uſe of it was attend... with a moſt Singular Bleſſing, and no leſs Remarkable Succeſs, ... in ſo my hand John Weldon. This Gentleman lives by the Cha... in King ſtreet, Golden Square. The ſaid Medicine is Sold at ... per Vial, by Mr. Perronet aforeſaid, in Dyot Street near Bloo... Mr. Acraft at the Blew-Coat Boy againſt the Royal Exch... Cornhill and by Mr. Watkins Tobacconiſt againſt the Market in K... ſtreet Weſtminſter.

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